

**Press Release for Thursday, February 12, 2009**

**CONTACT:** Blake Ulveling, (510) 282-1489, blake@collegecampaign.org

**\*\* EMBARGOED UNTIL: Thursday, February 12, 2009 at 10:30am \*\***

## **CALIFORNIA LAGS IN HIGHER EDUCATION PERFORMANCE**

### **Regional and Racial/Ethnic Disparities May Prevent California from Competing Globally**

*Sacramento, Calif.* – A new study by the Sacramento State Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP) makes this message clear: your chances of competing in the global economy can depend on where in California you live and who you are. By every major marker, Californians experience vastly different educational opportunities and outcomes depending on where they grow up and on their race and ethnicity.

*The Grades Are In – 2008: Is California Higher Education Measuring Up?* takes an up-close look at California's downward slide in higher education and concludes that while some regions in the state are performing much better than others, the regions of the state that are experiencing the most rapid population growth – such as the Inland Empire and the Central Valley – are tending to fare worse.

The fastest growing populations in the state are predominantly those who have been underrepresented in higher education and who are least well served by our education systems. These include young people who would be the first in their families to go to college, low-income individuals of all races and ethnicities, and immigrants.

“Our future as a state depends on our ability to educate our growing populations of young people and to focus our attention on improving opportunities and outcomes,” says Nancy Shulock, Director of IHELP. “We need to meet the challenges of our changing demographics.”

While California ranks third in the nation in the percentage of those 65 and older with an associate degree or higher, it ranks only 29<sup>th</sup> for those ages 25-34. Unless the pattern of falling education levels for each younger generation can be reversed, California will face growing problems in producing a competitive workforce.

“California, for all its promise and assets, lags many states in educating its people. It is at risk of falling further behind in the global competition for a skilled and innovative workforce and economy,” notes Pat Callan, President of The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

### **Regional and Racial/Ethnic Disparity**

For students growing up in California, the statistics show that their chances of being prepared for a workforce that increasingly demands at least an associate degree or higher, can be dramatically affected by where they live. Only about one in six working age adults in the Central Valley have at least a bachelor's degree, while over 40% of adults in the San Francisco Bay Area hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

High School students in the Bay Area and Los Angeles County are far more likely than others to complete the 15 “a through g” college preparatory courses required for admission to a UC or CSU. Over 40% of San Francisco Bay Area and LA County high school graduates completed these courses while only 17% of graduates in the Superior California region and 27% in the Inland Empire have done so. The college going rate also varies dramatically across regions – from a low of 27% in the Superior California region to 72% along the Central Coast (San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties).

For the state's black and Latino students, the disparities are also dramatic. Only a quarter of black and Latino high school graduates have completed the a-g curriculum compared with 40% of white graduates. Among young adults,

27% of Latinos and 35% of blacks are enrolled in college compared with 45% of whites. And while 47% of Asian adults and 38% of white adults have at least a bachelor's degree, only 21% of black adults and 10% of Latino adults have attained one.

There are also disparities in the path from enrollment to attainment of a certificate or degree. The rates by which whites earn degrees and certificates, compared to their enrollment numbers, is at least one-third higher than Latinos and blacks at four-year universities and community colleges.

By 2020, Latinos will account for 40 percent of the working age population, making their success in college particularly important to California's future.

### **Good Policy Matters**

While each region in the state has its own unique set of problems to solve, the state's ability to turn the lagging numbers around will come in the form of statewide planning, according to the report's authors.

The state as a whole has made some gains through concerted effort, but at the end of the day its students are not succeeding at the rates they must – both for their own economic futures and for the future of California's economy. Graduation rates for full-time college students are high, but California ranks 47<sup>th</sup> among states in the number of degrees and certificates awarded in relation to the number of undergraduate students enrolled. That low ranking reflects the large numbers of students enrolled part-time who do not earn college credentials.

California now leads the nation in the share of 8<sup>th</sup> graders enrolling in algebra, considered a milestone on the path to college. However, high enrollment in algebra has not yet translated into any substantial increase in those who enroll in the advanced math and science courses in high school that are important to college success. California ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in advanced math and science enrollment.

The state's middle school students have steadily increased their performance on the California Standards Tests in both math and the language arts, but their performance on national standardized tests ranks in the bottom fourth in all subject areas, and 48<sup>th</sup> in science.

Although California is struggling under an economic crisis that has struck a severe blow to higher education funding, policymakers and education leaders have a golden opportunity, according to Shulock, to create the kinds of low-cost, high-impact changes that will give the state the upper hand it needs to compete in the global economy.

"The policies we adopt matter a lot to students and ultimately to the state. It matters how much we charge students, how well we assist low-income families with those costs, how we structure the funding of our education systems, and how well California's education sectors work together to meet the needs of students and the state," says Shulock.

Among the study's key recommendations is to define a "public agenda" for higher education that sets specific goals for college participation and degree completion, lays out a policy framework for achieving the goals, and monitors the state's progress. The state does not currently have such a statewide plan, as it has tended to approach policy and planning individually for each segment of higher education.

The study also supports regional planning initiatives that address local needs and work towards the goals that the state sets, and it suggests accelerating college and career readiness planning and adopting an affordability policy that ensures affordable access to a college education.

Because the community colleges serve the vast majority of the state's college students, strategic policy initiatives affecting that segment present the greatest opportunity to produce more educated Californians. With Latino and

black undergraduate students more likely than white students to be enrolled in the community colleges rather than the UC or CSU, these changes will also address ethnic/racial disparity in the state.

“A crisis like the one we are in is a unique opportunity to step back, assess, and create strong policies that prepare for our future. A well educated population will buffer California from another economic crisis,” says Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

“Investing in higher education is not only an investment in the young people who go to college and succeed, but an investment in future business innovation. This investment produces greater returns for the state,” notes Siqueiros.

In addition to the recommendations for more coordinated planning, the study suggests specific actions that policymakers can take in a time of budget crisis to prepare for the future, including:

- Giving institutions more flexibility to use existing resources to best serve students
- Incorporating incentives for degree and program completion into funding formulas
- Limiting the state subsidy of individuals who take community college courses for recreational purposes in order to prioritize increasing educational attainment and meeting workforce demands.
- Establishing clear pathways for students – including more career-oriented pathways, more student-centered transfer pathways, and more efficient degree pathways within universities.

Addressing state and regional issues through effective leadership and policy will set California’s higher education system on a stronger course. With tough economic times at hand, California must look to one of its most valuable resources – its higher education system and the graduates it produces – to provide a workforce for the future.

The analysis for *The Grades Are In – 2008* was conducted by IHELP as follow up to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s December 2008 report, *Measuring Up*, that grades the 50 states on the performance of their higher education systems. “This report does just what we at the National Center hope to see in all states – it builds on the data from the *Measuring Up* report card and turns it into an agenda for action by state leaders,” said Callan.

**The Executive Summary and full report can be found on the IHELP website, <http://www.csus.edu/ihe>.**

**About IHELP:** The Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP), located at Sacramento State University, seeks to enhance leadership and policy for higher education in California and the nation, with an emphasis on community colleges in recognition of their importance to providing an educated and diverse citizenry and workforce. IHELP aims to produce information and services relevant to policymakers, practitioners, and educators. Learn more at: [www.csus.edu/ihe](http://www.csus.edu/ihe).

**About the Campaign for College Opportunity:** The Campaign for College Opportunity is a broad-based, bipartisan coalition, including business, education and labor leaders, and is dedicated to ensuring the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college. For more information, visit: [www.collegecampaign.org](http://www.collegecampaign.org).

---

**WHAT:** Telephone Media Briefing to Announce the Findings of “*The Grades Are In – 2008: Is California Higher Education Measuring Up?*” - Briefing followed by Q&A  
**Thursday, February 12, 2009, 10:30 a.m. PST**  
**Participant Call-In Number: 1-800-894-5910 :: Program Title: “Grades Are In”**

###